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Highline Living BARRIO QUEEN CELEBRATES SUCCESS OF DESERT RIDGE RESTAURANT, PLANS TEMPE & QUEEN CREEK LOCATIONS

written by David M. Brown

“Barrio” means “neighborhood,” and Barrio Queen means that — in regal style.

When Scottsdale restaurateurs Linda Nash and Steve Rosenfield opened the first Barrio Queen in 2011 in Old Town Scottsdale, they wanted to bring authentic southern Mexican cuisine and culture to the Valley. That year, Esquire called it one of its best New Restaurants in America.

The couple and their staff then opened locations in vibrant downtown Gilbert, and, in the summer of 2017, at the Desert Ridge Marketplace, 21001 N. Tatum Boulevard, in north Phoenix. Two new Barrio Queens, in Tempe Marketplace and Queen Creek, are planned for approximately January 2019.

All three locations offer lunch, happy hour, dinner and catering options as well as custom cocktails, including margaritas, and tequila and mescal menus. Each varies the food and spirits menus slightly, allowing patrons to enjoy different experiences at the same restaurant.

Signature dishes available at all three are the Chiles En Nogada, the Azteca Burrito and the Enchiladas Suizas. Popular margaritas are Deaths Door, Paloma and El Ray.

“We have always enjoyed going to Mexico, but for years we couldn’t find good Mexican food here at home. You’d find an American version instead,” says Linda, whose husband

has been in the food industry for his career. They met through business 15 years ago.

Throughout Mexico they search out food and design inspiration, meeting with chefs and families. “Everyone we meet is so kind and proud to share their recipes with us to take home and use at our restaurants,” she explains.

“We have always loved the Hispanic culture, which places so much focus on family and food,” she adds, noting that her Native America/Irish upbringing also emphasized the social importance of food.

“We would visit a place and an employee would come out with a torta, a carnitas sandwich, and say this is what my family makes, and then they’d invite us to their house to share other recipes with us,” she recalls. “So, we took down recipes and asked all of the cooks how they were able to keep the food so authentic.”

In Scottsdale, they worked with Chef Sylvana Esparza, who helped them debut the first location to great success. Creative Chef Julio Matta now coordinates recipes for the three locations.

“We know that we’ve hit the mark when we see Hispanic families dining with us. One person recently said to us, ‘We haven’t had food this good since my grandmother’s,’” she



says. “And, our employees themselves get off work and bring their families back that night.”

The Barrio Queen at Desert Ridge comprises 5,700 square-feet of indoor and outdoor space. The interior includes an open kitchen, a private tequila tasting room for 300-plus varieties and artwork from local and Mexican artists.

For the Tempe newbuild, and probably for Queen Creek as well, the couple has retained well-known Scottsdale architect, Mark Candelaria, AIA, to design a unique space for the young vibrant group that frequents the center: “We plan to augment the patio area and make the location look like a party,” he says, noting that his wife, Isabel Dellinger-Candelaria, will design the interior.

The menu includes favorites as well as dishes created for Desert Ridge. There is a “trompo” (a rotating vertical spit) for “al pastor” dishes, and diners can watch chefs creating tortillas from scratch. Everything at the restaurant is hand-made: salsa to chips to the tableside-prepared guacamole, which Travel and Leisure and USA Today have both highly noted.

“At Barrio Queen, we don’t just put the food on the table,” Linda says. “My husband and want you to be treated as we want to be treated. We want you to forget stress for a few hours. We want you to have a drink with us. We want to break bread with you. And we want you to have fun.”

For more information, including menus and location details, visit barrioqueen.com.